Family

Introduction to Sociology

How do you define family?

U.S. Census Bureau Definition
- A group of two or more persons related by blood, marriage or adoption and residing together
- Who is excluded in this definition?

Why do we care?
- Health insurance
- Medical decisions in emergency
- Life insurance
- Inheritance
- Family leave
- Parental rights
- Child custody
- Feelings of self-worth and acceptance

Recent Family Changes

Marriage Changes
- Age at first marriage:
  - 1890: Men (26 yrs.) — Women (22 yrs.)
  - 1950: Men (22.5) — Women (20.1)
  - 2000: Men (26.8) — Women (25.1)
- Why are people getting married later?
  
  Rising education
  Rising life expectancy
  More women in labor force
  Greater acceptance of alternative family forms
  Acceptance of premarital sex
  Increasing cohabitation.
Marriage Rates
Def. The number of people during the preceding 12 months per 1,000
- 1945: Peaked at 12.2 per 1,000
- 2001: 8.4 per 1,000
- 2005: 7.5 per 1,000
- White and African Americans have had a more drastic decline in marriage rates than Hispanics
- Part of decline in marriage has been matched by an increase in non-marital unions
- Increases in female earning power explains about 70% of the recent decline in marriage for white women

Singlehood
- Increased number of single people and people living alone
- Never-married adults: 15% of pop. in 1972, 25% of pop. in 2002
- Permanent singlehood – 1 in 3 African American women don’t marry
- Nearly 90% of people will eventually marry

Employed Mothers
- Increased participation of mothers in the workforce
- In 2001 only 30% of two-parent families were traditional (breadwinner and homemaker)
- Increase especially among married women with young children
- 80% of married women with their youngest child between 6-18 work

Fatherhood
- New definition of fatherhood
  - Should be involved
  - Increased shared custody
- Although women still do the majority of childcare responsibilities

Cohabitation
- Majority of marriages and remarriages begin as cohabiting relationships
  - 50-60% of new marriages
- Most people will cohab at some point in their lives
Single Parenthood
- Increase in the number of single-parent families
- Why the increase?
  - Births to single mothers
    - 1 out of 3 children is born outside of marriage (70% of African American children)
  - Divorce
  - Cohabitation
- Transition stage: Over 60% of U.S. children born since 1986 spend a year or more in a single parent family.

Why has there been an increase in divorce rates?
- Social acceptance of divorce and no fault divorce laws
- Economic independence of women
- Marriage based on romantic love and personal fulfillment

* In the past decade divorce rates have actually stabilized and decreased slightly

Divorce
- About 50% of recent first marriages and 60% of remarriages end in divorce.
- Most critical times for chance of divorce:
  - First 7yrs of marriage – negative affect
  - When the first child reaches 14yrs old – absence of positive affect

Remarriage
- Half of all marriages are remarriages for one or both people
  - Most divorced people remarry within 4yrs
- 1 out of 3 kids will live in a remarried or cohabiting stepfamily at some point before reaching adulthood

Gay and Lesbian Families
- Over 600,000 same-sex couples (sharing a household) in U.S. and Puerto Rico
  - At least 30 percent have children
- Many in long-term relationships
  - No legal recognition
  - Increased societal acceptance

What does all of this mean?
### What is the meaning of marriage today?

#### ACTIONS
- People are having premarital sex
- People are living together before they get married
- People are putting school and a career as the focus – not focusing on marriage
- Marriage isn’t necessary to have children – 1 out of 3 kids are born outside of marriage

#### ATTITUDES
- Marriage and parenthood aren’t necessary
- Increasing acceptance of alternative lifestyles and family choices
- Increasing acceptance of divorce
- “Shouldn’t stay together just for the kids”
- Marriage isn’t necessary for sexual expression
- Increasing acceptance of cohabitation
- Most acceptance is when the couple has plans to marry
- Younger generations see cohabitation as a good idea to try things out
- Unmarried childbearing has lost some of its stigma

### What is the meaning of marriage today?

#### Current context of marriage:
- Individuals have choice – marriage isn’t a necessity
- Change in nature of rewards that people seek from marriage – personal growth, intimacy, communication
- Symbolic significance of marriage remains high and may even have increased

### Changing meaning of marriage

#### Changing definition of family
- Family based more on voluntary ties, choices and needs – rather than obligation

### U.S. Census Bureau Definition:
- A group of two or more persons related by blood, marriage or adoption and residing together

### A more appropriate definition:
- Two or more people who:
  - See their identity as importantly attached to the group
  - Share close emotional ties and functions